

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Water Resources Division
Water Rights Bureau

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
For Routine Actions with Limited Environmental Impact

Part I. Proposed Action Description

1. Applicant/Contact name and address:

Ouzel Reach Ranch, LLC
131 South Higgins, Unit 3-6
Missoula, Montana 59802

Morgan Case, Trout Unlimited (Representative)
P.O. Box 412
Helena, Montana 59624

2. Type of action: Application to Change Water Right No. 76M 30121782

3. Water source name: Ninemile Creek, tributary to the Clark Fork River, Missoula County

4. Location affected by project: A 0.9-mile reach of Ninemile Creek beginning at the historical point of diversion in the NENWSW of Section 27, T16N R23W and ending in the NENENW of Section 34, T16N R23W

5. Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and benefits: On March 7th, 2019, the Applicant submitted Application to Change Water Right No. 76M 30121782 to temporarily change the purpose and place of use of Statement of Claim No. 76M 111122-00 from irrigation to instream flow for the benefit of the fishery resource in Ninemile Creek. 32 acres within the historical place of use will be retired from irrigation during the term of this temporary change. A flow rate and volume of 0.5 CFS up to 157.2 AF will be appropriated instream for the 154-day period of use spanning May 13th to October 13th. The instream place of use consists of a 0.9-mile reach of Ninemile Creek beginning at the historical point of diversion in the NENWSW of Section 27, T16N R23W and ending in the NENENW of Section 34, T16N R23W, Missoula County. The DNRC shall issue a water right change authorization if an applicant proves they have met the criteria in §85-2-402, MCA.

6. Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment:

Montana Natural Heritage Program:
Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks:
Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality:
Montana Dept. of Justice
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service:

Species of Concern
2005 Dewatered Stream List
303(d) list of impaired streams
Natural Resource Damages Program
Web Soil Survey

Part II. Environmental Review

1. Environmental Impact Checklist:

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY AND DISTRIBUTION

Water quantity - Assess whether the source of supply is identified as a chronically or periodically dewatered stream by DFWP. Assess whether the proposed use will worsen the already dewatered condition.

The Montana DFWP lists Ninemile Creek as a periodically dewatered stream with a species mix of brook trout, Westslope cutthroat trout, and various native nongame species. DFWP has identified Ninemile Creek as one of the top instream flow enhancement priorities and has stated that dewatering in the creek is an obvious limiting factor for fish populations in terms of access for adult migrants in the watershed, which is regarded as one of the best remaining spawning and rearing areas in the region and is critical for the recruitment it provides for the Clark Fork River. This project will retire acres from irrigation and enhance streamflows in the creek. Leaving additional water instream is considered a tangible benefit to the aquatic life of Ninemile Creek, which is considered one of the most important tributary watersheds in the Clark Fork River.

Determination: No negative impact.

Water quality - Assess whether the stream is listed as water quality impaired or threatened by DEQ, and whether the proposed project will affect water quality.

The proposed project will not alter nor adversely affect water quality in Ninemile Creek. The purpose of this project is to retire acres from irrigation and leave water instream for the benefit of the aquatic ecosystem. Streamflow augmentation resulting from this change in water use will help provide better habitat for critical aquatic species.

Determination: No negative impact.

Groundwater - Assess if the proposed project impacts ground water quality or supply. If this is a groundwater appropriation, assess if it could impact adjacent surface water flows.

Determination: N/A as this change in water use does not involve groundwater.

DIVERSION WORKS - Assess whether the means of diversion, construction and operation of the appropriation works of the proposed project will impact any of the following: channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, riparian areas, dams, well construction.

The Applicant proposes to retire their entire share of the irrigated place of use and diversionary activities during the term of this temporary change.

Determination: No negative impact.

UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Endangered and threatened species - Assess whether the proposed project will impact any threatened or endangered fish, wildlife, plants or aquatic species or any “species of special concern,” or create a barrier to the migration or movement of fish or wildlife. For groundwater, assess whether the proposed project, including impacts on adjacent surface flows, would impact any threatened or endangered species or “species of special concern.”

The Montana Natural Heritage Program was consulted to determine if there are any threatened or endangered fish, wildlife, plants, aquatic species, or any “species of special concern” that could be impacted by the proposed project. This project will not result in the loss or negative alteration of any wildlife habitat.

Determination: No negative impact.

Wetlands - Consult and assess whether the apparent wetland is a functional wetland (according to COE definitions), and whether the wetland resource would be impacted.

Determination: Project does not negatively impact existing wetlands.

Ponds - For ponds, consult and assess whether existing wildlife, waterfowl, or fisheries resources would be impacted.

Determination: No negative impact – project does not involve ponds.

GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE - Assess whether there will be degradation of soil quality, alteration of soil stability, or moisture content. Assess whether the soils are heavy in salts that could cause saline seep.

Determination: This proposed change will not result in any negative impact to surrounding soils.

VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS - Assess impacts to existing vegetative cover. Assess whether the proposed project would result in the establishment or spread of noxious weeds.

Determination: This proposed change will not result in any negative impact to vegetation cover, or contribute to the spread or establishment of noxious weeds.

AIR QUALITY - Assess whether there will be a deterioration of air quality or adverse effects on vegetation due to increased air pollutants.

There will be no source of pollution associated with the change in water use that will alter air quality.

Determination: No negative impact.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES - Assess whether there will be degradation of unique archeological or historical sites in the vicinity of the proposed project if it is on State or Federal Lands. If it is not on State or Federal Lands simply state NA-project not located on State or Federal Lands.

Determination: N/A – project not located on State or Federal Lands.

DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY - Assess any other impacts on environmental resources of land, water and energy not already addressed.

This project will not negatively impact any other environmental resources.

Determination: No negative impact.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS - Assess whether the proposed project is inconsistent with any locally adopted environmental plans and goals.

Determination: No negative impact.

ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES - Assess whether the proposed project will impact access to or the quality of recreational and wilderness activities.

Determination: No negative impact.

HUMAN HEALTH - Assess whether the proposed project impacts on human health.

Determination: No negative impact

PRIVATE PROPERTY - Assess whether there are any government regulatory impacts on private property rights.

Yes ☐ No ☒ If yes, analyze any alternatives considered that could reduce, minimize, or eliminate the regulation of private property rights.

Determination: No negative impact.

OTHER HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES - For routine actions of limited environmental impact, the following may be addressed in a checklist fashion.

Impacts on:

- (a) Cultural uniqueness and diversity? None identified.
- (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? None identified.
- (c) Existing land uses? Irrigated footprint will be retired – no negative impacts.
- (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? None identified.
- (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? None identified.
- (f) Demands for government services? None identified.
- (g) Industrial and commercial activity? None identified.
- (h) Utilities? None identified.
- (i) Transportation? None identified.

(j) Safety? None identified.

(k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? None identified.

2. Secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical environment and human population:

Secondary Impacts None identified.

Cumulative Impacts None identified.

3. Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures: None identified.

4. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives to the proposed action, including the no action alternative, if an alternative is reasonably available and prudent to consider: No reasonable alternatives were identified.

Part III. Conclusion

1. Preferred Alternative: None identified.

2. Comments and Responses

4. Finding:

Yes ____ No X Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:

An EIS is not the appropriate level of analysis for the proposed action because no significant negative impacts were identified.

Name of person(s) responsible for preparation of EA:

Name: Danika Holmes

Title: Hydrologist/Water Resource Specialist

Date: October 4th, 2019